



**SPORT
NEW ZEALAND**
IHI AOTEAROA

The value of play, active recreation, and sport for local government

—
August 2023

Purpose

Local government has a unique and critical role in the play, active recreation, and sport ecosystem, providing vital community assets that are part of the fabric of our communities along with grants and opportunities that support local communities to participate in play, active recreation, and sport.

With rising budget pressures, local government, now more than ever, needs to be able to demonstrate the return that is delivered from its investments across the board. This document is intended to illustrate the value that local government investment in the local play, active recreation, and sport system delivers. We hope that this document, and the evidence contained within it, can be used to support existing investment in the play, active recreation, and sport sector, as well as supporting any proposals for additional investment in this key area.

Provision of play, active recreation, and sport facilities, infrastructure, resources, and opportunities is important to a large proportion of the population.

- In 2022:
 - 73% of the adult population and 92% of young people (aged 5-17yrs) participate each week in play, active recreation, and sport
 - 79% of adults and 63% of young people would like to be doing more play, active recreation and sport
 - High deprivation, Asian and Pasifika population groups are significantly less likely to participate¹
- Research into New Zealanders' beliefs around the value of sport and active recreation in 2017 found a broad base of support for sport and active recreation and a belief in its value to New Zealand and New Zealanders. The value of sport and active recreation is seen to lie in the contributions it makes to individuals, families, communities, and the country as a whole.²

Play, active recreation, and sport is a cost-effective investment towards local government wellbeing outcomes.

International and domestic evidence clearly demonstrates that play, sport, and active recreation generate significant value for society across multiple wellbeing domains and outcomes, many of which are specifically relevant to the outcomes sought by local government.

- Recently published research from a Social Return on Investment³ study found that for every \$1 spent on play, active recreation, and sport, there is a social return of \$2.12 to New Zealand. This means that for every dollar invested in play, active recreation, and sport, the social return is more than doubled. This is a conservative figure and the

¹ Sport New Zealand (2023). [Active NZ. Changes in Participation. The New Zealand Participation Survey 2022.](#) Wellington

² Angus & Associates (2017). [Better Understanding the Value of Sport](#)

³ SROI measures the non-market value of outcomes generated through sport and recreational activity and the net costs of providing opportunities. Social impact is monetised by comparing the changes in wellbeing (measured by "life satisfaction" or "happiness") induced by an outcome with the change in wellbeing induced by income.

actual return, especially for those currently missing out on opportunities to be active, is likely to be higher.⁴

- In 2019 participation in play, active recreation, and sport generated \$3.32 billion return in subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction and happiness) within New Zealand.⁴

It is clear that prioritising investment in facilities, infrastructure, resources, and opportunities to encourage participation in play, active recreation, and sport can support the wellbeing of communities and the achievement of a broad range of local government priorities and outcomes.

Conversely, the failure to adequately prioritise play, active recreation, and sport can have significant impacts on achieving the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing that local government is expected to deliver for its communities and the wider social value experienced by individuals and communities.

This document summarises the evidence about how play, active recreation, and sport can support the four types of wellbeing that local government is expected to deliver (social, economic, environmental, and cultural), and includes some relevant case studies from around New Zealand.

⁴ Sport New Zealand (2022). [Social Return on Investment \(SROI\) of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Summary Report. October 2022.](#)

Social Wellbeing

Play, active recreation, and sport have the potential to develop important social skills, strengthen social networks, bring communities together, and curb antisocial behaviours.

Evidence relating to the impact of play, active recreation, and sport on social wellbeing outcomes can be considered across four broad themes as follows:

- Development of social skills
- Strengthened social networks
- Bringing communities together and increasing a sense of belonging
- Improving pride and reducing antisocial behaviours in communities.

Development of social skills

- Research demonstrates that peer and parent engagement through developmentally appropriate play offers the opportunity for children to develop social-emotional skills such as problem solving, collaboration, and negotiation as well as language, and self-regulation skills that build executive function and support effective social interaction with others.⁵
- Play has been shown to support the formation of the safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with parents and caregivers that children need to thrive.⁵
- Regular participation by young people in sport, particularly team sport, is associated with improved social skills, social integration, competence, cooperation, and teamwork.⁶

Strengthened social networks

- Participation in sport and recreational physical activity, particularly when it takes place in teams or groups, can help foster improved social cohesion, community connectedness, and community identity.
 - The Sport NZ SROI analysis estimated that in 2019, \$1.13 billion return could be attributed to enhanced social capital⁷ within New Zealand as a result of participation in play, active recreation, and sport.⁸
 - Evidence from a recent literature review showed positive impacts reported for older adults in the form of social support, making friends, and feeling integrated as a community, and for young people through developing friendships, a sense of who they are among others, a sense of belonging, and a sense of community.⁹

⁵ Yogman, M et al (2018). [The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children](#). Pediatrics. Volume 142, no 3, September 2018.

⁶ Eime, R.M., Young, J.A., Harvey, J.T., Charity, M.J., Payne. W. (2013). [A Systematic Review of the Psychological and Social Benefits of Participation in Sport for Children and Adolescents: Informing Development of a Conceptual Model of Health through Sport](#) · International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 2013, 10: 98

⁷ The willingness of diverse individuals and groups to trust and cooperate with each other in the interests of all, supported by shared intercultural norms and values.

⁸ Sport New Zealand (2022). [Social Return on Investment \(SROI\) of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Summary Report. October 2022.](#)

⁹ Davies, L; Dalziel, P & Savage, C. (2023). [Social Return on Investment of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Technical Report.](#)

- 73% of respondents to a Value of Sport survey believed sport and physical activity help build vibrant and stimulating communities. This view was stronger amongst Māori respondents (80%)¹⁰

“Sports clubs provide social connection and community – club rooms are full of pictures which contain friends, family etc...providing a sense and link to the community – there’s my father, there’s my grandfather, there’s my uncles...” [Cultural Organisation, Wellington]¹⁰

Bringing communities together and increasing a sense of belonging

- Performance of our athletes on the world stage increases New Zealanders’ feelings of belonging to New Zealand. 70% of adults and 61% of young people rated their agreement with the statement “I feel a sense of belonging to New Zealand when New Zealand athletes and teams compete” 6 or more out of 10 in the Active NZ survey 2021.¹¹
- 70% of respondents to a Value of Sport survey in New Zealand agree that “high performance sport brings communities together”¹⁰
- Evidence demonstrates that provision of equitable and safe sport and active recreation opportunities that are inclusive of the whole community can connect individuals and groups across lines that might typically divide society (such as race, class, gender, or religion)¹⁰
- Participation in sport and physical activity programmes has been shown to support feelings of belonging and inclusion for migrant populations.
 - In 2019, the most common social group or club for new migrants to belong to was a sports club or group (22%), followed by a religious group (19%)¹²
 - Nearly all participants of the Auckland Council-funded Connect2sport programme for new migrants felt that taking part in the programme helped them feel more at home in New Zealand.¹³
- Play has a therapeutic and rehabilitative role in helping children recover following crises (such as Covid-19, the Christchurch earthquakes, or the effects of Cyclone Gabrielle). This includes supporting children to regulate the body’s stress response, providing an opportunity to make sense of what has happened to them and their community, and develop or rebuild social connections through shared experiences and achieving a sense of belonging. e.g., the teddy bear hunt during the Level 4 Covid-19 lockdown.^{14 15}

¹⁰ Angus & Associates (2017). [Better Understanding the Value of Sport](#)

¹¹ Sport New Zealand (2022). [Active New Zealand 2021 Comprehensive Data Tables](#) ·

¹² Premium Research (2021). [Settling in New Zealand: Migrant Survey Trends from 2015 to 2019](#). Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Wellington.

¹³ Auckland Council. (2014) Active Communities Investment: Project Exit Report. Connect2Sport September 2014. Unpublished

¹⁴ International Play Association (2017). [Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis. Synthesis of Research in Six Countries](#).

¹⁵ Sport Canterbury (n.d.). [Access to Play for Tamariki During and Beyond a Crisis \(phase 1\)](#). Sport New Zealand, Wellington

"Participating in the programme has helped remove insecurities and given new migrants confidence in the New Zealand community. It has made them feel "wanted, and that New Zealand is an inclusive country that welcomes and supports migrants from all ethnicities".¹³

"Sport helps me to overcome the feeling of being in a new country" Respondent¹⁶

"I think sport has a unique capacity to bring people together. For instance, a social football game, when you're playing as part of a team and you have these experiences together and you feel the elation of when you score or whatever, high five each other. I feel like that would be pretty awesome team building, compared to anything." Respondent¹⁰

Improving pride and reducing antisocial behaviours in communities

- Evidence suggests that the connection with supportive individuals or groups within structured community sport and recreation programmes encourages the development of a number of 'protective factors' which may reduce antisocial behaviour.¹⁷
- Improving local sport and recreation facilities such as local parks can improve participation levels and community pride, while reducing perceived instances of antisocial behaviour within a community.¹⁸
- Higher levels of social capital have been found to be correlated with a number of desirable outcomes, such as lower crime rates.¹⁹
- 77% of respondents to a "Value of Sport" survey agree that sport and physical activities help instil a sense of pride in our communities.²⁰
- Major sporting events increase exposure and can improve perceptions of host cities.
 - 85% of public attendees at the World Masters Games 2017 agreed that the event was well delivered and enhanced their pride in the city(Aucklanders only)²¹

Case Study: Community Connect – Touch NZ

Drawing on the power of sport as a tool for engagement, Community Connect is a Touch NZ initiative that aims to increase social capital in communities, particularly those which have been identified as high deprivation, through regular community-led social sport, culture, and recreational activity.

The first Community Connect pilot hub, Tāmaki Touched, was trialled in Auckland in 2016. A local steering group was established with local community representatives. The steering group's overarching goals were to create positive community outcomes such as increased

¹⁶ Ahmad, N & Thorpe, H. (2020). [Building Cultural Inclusion in Sport. Insights from Muslim Women in Sport and Active Recreation](#). Sport NZ, Wellington.

¹⁷ Cameron, M and MacDougall, C. (2000). Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice. Crime through Sport and Physical Activity. Australian Institute of Criminology, No 165.

¹⁸ McFadyen, J. and Longhurst, G. (2014). Parks for Sport and Recreation. Third Phase Evaluation of Impact Research Report. Wintec, Hamilton

¹⁹ Bailey, R (2005). Evaluating the Relationship Between Physical Education, Sport and Social Inclusion. Educational Review, 57:1, 71-90

²⁰ Angus & Associates (2017). [Better Understanding the Value of Sport](#)

²¹ World Masters Games. (2017). 2017 World Masters Games Auckland New Zealand. Post Event Report.

community engagement, improved community health, and reduced crime by using sport as the delivery mechanism.

Tāmaki Touched offered a children’s competition and a mixed gender, all-ages whānau competition. As well as touch, other activities are offered to cater for the whole family, including a boot camp and programmes for tamariki involving cultural dance and songs and games. A DJ helps create a fun atmosphere, and free food and prizes from sponsors are used as incentives to encourage attendance.

Between 2016 and 2018, six Tāmaki Touched sporting modules were delivered, engaging over 2,100 participants. Feedback from participants has highlighted how this initiative is positively impacting the social and physical wellbeing of individuals and communities. Building on the success of this pilot, an additional six hubs have been launched in targeted communities across the wider Auckland and Northland regions.

We saw Tāmaki Touched as an ideal project to help achieve positive community outcomes as a whole, as it is family-friendly and also community-led. The two coordinators are both local and have strong community connections which help connect with this targeted group.” – Inspector Joe Tipene, New Zealand Police

“It brings everyone together in the community, helps the community to get fit.” – Tamaki Touched Participant.

The teams are made up of all sorts from Touch reps through to complete newbies... they also involve getting some of those young ones who miss out on playing in the mainstream competition teams. They love the opportunity to play with their whole whanau.” – Sandi Hackett, Touch NZ

Sources and Related Links:

- [Tamaki Touched Full Case Study](#)
- [Tamaki Touched Video](#)
- [Community Connect Moving Manurewa Video](#)
- [Touch NZ Community Connect website](#)

Case Study: Lumsden Place Play Street

Lumsden Place in Hastings was a hive of activity on Sunday March 12th, 2023. Around 25 children and their whānau enjoyed a playful and fun afternoon. This was the beginning of their personal Cyclone Gabrielle recovery journey as the first hosts of a Play Street in Hastings.

Play Streets temporarily restrict vehicle traffic on quiet local streets, so that tamariki, whānau, and their neighbours can connect and play safely and freely outside.

After facing low-level flooding in the street as a result of the recent cyclone, play was seen as a priority by the resident Play Street Organiser Pia Bradshaw. Initial feedback from adult residents was hugely positive. Many made comments about the delight in being a part of the Play Street kaupapa to re-create opportunities and experiences of their childhood for the youth of today to enjoy. Support was high for Play Streets to become a regular activity for the street, which was echoed with gusto from the children as they enjoyed “making new friends” and “having so many others to play with”.

The Hastings District Council Te Waka Tākaro provided large blue foam building blocks, a highlight for many of the children. Other activity highlights included chalk drawing, throwing games, scootering, skating, and biking. One family even wheeled out their portable basketball hoop into the middle of the street for everyone to ‘shoot hoops’.

The Lumsden Place Play Street is part of a region-wide approach by all four Councils to enable more opportunities for whānau to connect and strengthen relationships, and be active in their communities comfortably, confidently, and safely.

“Having all four Hawke’s Bay Council’s working together as a collective and advocating for play streets will mean region-wide consistency and support for whānau to be able to connect and increase play within their neighbourhoods”. Nicki Heremaia – Play Lead, Sport Hawke’s Bay

"Our tamariki need to have more play experiences, especially in light of recent events. Connecting with those children close to them who have had a similar experience is really valuable". Pia Bradshaw, Play Street Organiser

Sources and Related Links:

[Sport Hawke's Bay Case Study - Lumsden Place Play Street](#)

Economic Wellbeing

The sport and recreation sector makes significant direct and indirect contributions to the New Zealand economy.

Evidence relating to the impact of play, active recreation, and sport on economic wellbeing outcomes can be considered across five broad themes as follows:

- Economic value generated for local communities and businesses
- Employment of New Zealanders in the play, active recreation, and sport sector
- Productivity gains as a result of physical activity
- Savings for communities as a result of the volunteer workforce
- Economic impact of major events.

Economic value generated for local communities and businesses

- The sport and recreation sector contributed \$4.9 billion, or 2.3% of GDP in New Zealand in the 2012/13 financial year²²
- A study assessing the contribution of mountain biking to the Rotorua Lakes economy found that:
 - \$103.4m was spent by visitors who visited Rotorua for the sole purpose of mountain biking with a further \$36.4m contributed by those who mountain biked while staying in Rotorua for other reasons – a total contribution of \$139.8m
 - At this level of spending, the mountain bike visitor economy is just under 20% of the size of the total visitor economy in Rotorua at its pre-covid peak.²³

Employment of New Zealanders in the play, active recreation, and sport sector

- 53,904 people were recorded in the 2013 Census as employed in sport and recreation industries or occupations, an increase of 11.5% on the 2006 Census.²²

Productivity gains as a result of physical activity

- Participation in physical activity can have a positive impact on population productivity due to improved health outcomes, quality of life, and reduced sickness and absenteeism.
 - The Sport NZ Social Return on Investment report estimated the value of higher output from reduced absenteeism associated with participation in physical activity to be \$889m in 2019.²⁴
 - An Australian study estimates the impact of sport on increased productivity to be \$0.8b annually due to lower absenteeism from work, greater personal productivity, and increased human capital as a result of participating in sport.²⁵

Savings for communities as a result of the volunteer workforce

- A significant non-profit workforce of volunteers coordinates and delivers active recreation and sport opportunities to communities every week, representing significant savings for communities.

²² Dalziel, P. (2015). [The Economic Value of Sport and Outdoor Recreation to New Zealand](#): Updated Data. AERU, Lincoln University.

²³ Benje Patterson, People & Places (2022). [The contribution of mountain biking to the Rotorua Lakes Economy](#).

²⁴ Davies, L; Dalziel, P & Savage, C. (2023). [Social Return on Investment of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Technical Report](#).

²⁵ KPMG. (2020). Social Value of Sport: [Quantifying the non-economic benefits of sport and active recreation](#).

- Active NZ 2019 estimates around 1,230,000 adults volunteered at least once in the previous 12 months for a sport, exercise, or recreation activity (25% of estimated resident population).²⁶
- The Sport NZ Social Return on Investment report found the replacement value of volunteering in 2019 to be \$3.09bn.²⁷

Economic impact of major events

- Hosting major sporting events has significant economic benefits for New Zealand as a whole as well as the regions where these events take place.
 - The 2011 Rugby World Cup was estimated to have resulted in short-term expansion of the national economy to around \$1,730m, sustaining the equivalent of 22,890 extra jobs for one year.²⁸
 - The World Masters Games 2017 added \$63m to GDP.²⁹
 - The 2015 ICC Cricket World Cup (held across 7 cities throughout New Zealand) attracted 225,000 unique visitors³⁰ to New Zealand. 20% of these were international visitors, providing \$110m to GDP in New Zealand and an additional 2,360 jobs.³¹
 - Hosting major events offers longer term benefits for communities through the development of new and existing facilities. For example, the ICC CWC 2015 helped support the redevelopment of Hagley Oval in Christchurch³¹ and the Gender-Neutral Facilities Upgrade project saw all three match venues and eight RWC 2021 training grounds (many of them grassroots rugby clubs) refurbished to be gender-neutral and to world class standards.³²

²⁶ Sport New Zealand (2020) Active NZ 2019. [Comprehensive National Data Tables](#).

²⁷ Davies, L; Dalziel, P & Savage, C. (2023). [Social Return on Investment of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Technical Report](#).

²⁸ Dalziel, P. (2015). [The Economic Value of Sport and Outdoor Recreation to New Zealand: Updated Data](#). AERU, Lincoln University.

²⁹ World Masters Games. (2017). 2017 World Masters Games Auckland New Zealand. Post Event Report.

³⁰ Unique visitors are the number of unique people visiting a state or region as a direct result of the Tournament, including those who attend matches within their home-region.

³¹ PWC (2015) [Cricket World Cup 2015 Ltd. Economic impact and benefits analysis of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2015. Final Report](#).

³² Rugby World Cup Aotearoa (2022) Rugby World Cup 2021 Post Tournament Report.

Environmental Wellbeing

Provision of green space for play, sport, and active recreation, and infrastructure for active transportation, can support the achievement of environmental and community wellbeing outcomes.

Evidence relating to the impact of play, active recreation, and sport on environmental wellbeing outcomes can be considered across four broad themes as follows:

- Creation of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours
- Creation of more environmentally friendly urban environments
- Reduced emissions from active transport
- Improved mental wellbeing from being active in natural environments.

Creation of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours

- Childhood outdoor recreation has been positively linked with adult pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours.³³

Creation of more environmentally friendly urban environments

- The provision of well-designed green spaces for physical activity can provide urban environments better suited to cope with weather extremes such as heavy rain events, contribute to keeping urban environments cool and increasing the health and wellbeing of residents.^{34 35 36 37}

Reduced emissions from active transport

- Improved environmental and wellbeing outcomes can be achieved by supporting more active transport. A European study found that an average person cycling one trip/day more and driving one trip/day less for 200 days a year would decrease mobility-related lifecycle CO₂ emissions by about 0.5 tonnes over a year.³⁸
- Research by the University of Auckland found that a 5% shift in vehicle kilometres to cycling would save approximately 22 million litres of fuel and reduce transport-related greenhouse emissions by 0.4%.³⁹

³³ Harbrow, M (2019). Visitors as advocates. [A review of the relationship between participation in outdoor recreation and support for conservation and the environment](#). NZ Department of Conservation, Wellington

³⁴ Newman et al (2019). [Resilience through regeneration. The economics of repurposing vacant land with green infrastructure](#). Landsc Archit Front. 2019 Jan;6(6)

³⁵ Bauwelinck et al (2021). [Residing in urban areas with higher green space is associated with lower mortality risk: A census-based cohort study with ten years of follow-up](#). Environ Int. 2021 Mar;148

³⁶ Jungman et al (2023). [Cooling cities through urban green infrastructure: a health impact assessment of European cities](#). The Lancet, Volume 401; 10376

³⁷ Demuzere (2014). [Mitigating and adapting to climate change: multi-functional and multi-scale assessment of green urban infrastructure](#). Journal of Environmental Management, Volume 146

³⁸ Brand et al (2021) [The climate change mitigation impacts of active travel: Evidence from a longitudinal panel study in seven European cities](#). Global Environmental Change, Volume 67, 2021.

³⁹ Lindsay G, Macmillan A, Woodward A. [Moving urban trips from cars to bicycles: impact on health and emissions](#). Aust NZ J Public Health. 2011 Feb;35(1):54-60.

Improved mental wellbeing from being active in natural environments

- Provision of public green spaces, including those for recreational and sport activity, have been found to be associated with greater mental wellbeing.⁴⁰

Case Study: Scotts Point Sustainable Sports Park – Auckland Council

Scott Point Sustainable Sports Park is a 16.4ha area of land in the northwest of Auckland that is about to be transformed from a rural landscape to a public park to meet the needs of a new community of up to 20,000 residents in the next few years. This project will help steer the future course of design, development, and management of parks across Auckland in a way that responds to the urgent environmental needs of our planet.

The park will comprise three main areas: an area for sports and active recreation, an informal recreation area, and an area of ecological restoration and conservation. The layout of the park has been driven by the retention of natural landforms to minimise the need for earthworks. Re-use of materials that exist on site, as well as utilising reclaimed materials from other demolition projects, will minimise construction waste. New materials will be permeable, have lower energy and emissions expended to produce and install them and include modular products to enable future reuse.

Renewable energy such as solar panels, wind turbines, and kinetic energy will be used providing a 'closed energy loop' for the park. For example, paver technology will harness kinetic energy, produced when people walk on them, and energy generated from children on playground equipment will be reused for things like powering LED lighting. Provision for sustainable transportation to, from and around the site, like public transport, electric vehicles, and e-bikes, has been included. Best practices for stormwater capture, treatment, and reuse will minimise maintenance and use of potable water for irrigation for sports fields.

"The sports park truly embodies the realisation of Auckland Council's vision of an Auckland that celebrates our diversity and cultural richness, enhances and cares for our outstanding environment, and leverages our innovative nature." Lisa Whyte, Upper Harbour Local Board Chair

Sources and Related Links:

- [Scott Point Sustainable Sports Park - ISCouncil](#)
- [Scott Point Sustainable Sports Park | Auckland Council - YouTube](#)

Case Study: Naenae Pool: NZ's first Greenstar 5 Pool – Hutt City Council

The new Naenae Pool and Fitness Centre is one of the most significant infrastructure projects currently underway at Hutt City Council. A sustainability focus for the rebuild has seen Hutt City Council approved for only the third Green, Social and Sustainability loan to a New Zealand council from the Local Government Funding Agency (LGFA).

A key driver across the Naenae Pool and Fitness Centre planning is sustainability, not just during the project build but also for the ongoing operation of the facility. The design team is working alongside crown agency Callaghan Innovation to be the first aquatic centre in New Zealand to have a Green Star Five rating.

Environmentally friendly practices are being used throughout construction of the pool. For example, 90% of all building materials have been recycled or reused, saving more than 13,000 tonnes of scrap metal and concrete from going to landfill.

⁴⁰ Wood, L; Hooper, P; Foster, S; Bull, F (2017). [Public green spaces and positive mental health – investigating the relationship between access, quantity and types of parks and mental wellbeing](#). Health & Place, Volume 48

Once up and running the new pool will see significant reductions in both energy usage and emissions. The new pool will be 65% bigger than the old pool with up to 53% reduction on energy use. Emissions will be reduced by nearly 50%

The new pool is due to be completed in mid-2024.

"Right from the beginning we have ensured this project meets our new sustainable priorities. We are focused on reducing the impact on our environment, providing a state-of-the-art facility that delivers for our community, reduces ongoing operational costs and achieves a New Zealand Green Building Council 5 Green Star rated aquatic building – a first in New Zealand." Hutt City Council Chief Executive – Jo Miller

Sources and Related Links:

- [Naenae Projects | Hutt City Council](#)
- [HCC focus on environmental sustainability gets approval for the third LGFA green loan | Hutt City Council](#)

Case Study: When play becomes business as usual – Hamilton City Council

Finalised in April 2019, the Hamilton City Council Play Strategy is a 20-year vision that focuses on the Council's contribution to making Hamilton a great place for everyone to play.

Prior to the strategy, play was only considered at locations such as playgrounds, parks, and sport facilities. The strategy expanded on this traditional definition to focus on providing opportunities across the city, nurturing spontaneous play and making better use of the natural environment. With this change in focus alongside a recognition of the positive wellbeing outcomes of play, has been a commitment from Hamilton City Council to enable play and look for opportunities to embed it in their work across business units.

The impact of this strategy is clear with play now embedded in a diverse range of strategies, policies, and plans across the organisation such as the Nature in the City Strategy, Central City Transformation Plan 2021-51, Disability Policy 2022-25, and the Hamilton Urban Growth Strategy.

An example of this integration is an innovative approach to incorporate play into new spaces as part of a major wastewater pipeline project in 2020.

The project required the digging up of grass berms and other earthworks to install new wastewater pipes. Rather than return those areas to how they were, Hamilton City Council staff, in partnership with Sport Waikato, saw a chance to install some play features including a painted footpath "maze", an obstacle course of rocks and logs, and a spot to measure your jumping distance. This space now presents an opportunity for communities to "play on the way" as they move through this area. A great example of how play is so much more than just playgrounds.

"It [the Play Strategy] was borne out of a desire to improve the sense of connectedness in our communities and to think of all our public space as potential play spaces, where children can explore their neighbourhoods, play cricket in the streets outside their home and roam the gullies." – Amanda Banks – Hamilton city Council Policy and Strategy Advisor

"The Play Strategy ...is proving a valuable tool for guiding our thinking and planning, not just when it comes to parks, indoor facilities and aquatics, but the wider Council too." Lance Vervoort, Hamilton City Council General Manager for Community

Sources and Related Links

- Hamilton City Council (2019). [Hamilton City Council's Play Strategy. Tuuhura te tini taonga o Kirikiriroa hei whakapakari tinana, wairua, hinengaro. 2019-2039.](#)
- Hamilton City Council (2019). [Hamilton is the place to play.](#) 29 November 2019
- Hamilton City Council (2022). [When play becomes business as usual.](#) 21 October 2022

Cultural Wellbeing

Participation in play, active recreation, and sport can strengthen feelings of identity and culture and feelings of belonging within and across cultures.

Evidence relating to the impact of play, active recreation, and sport on cultural wellbeing outcomes can be considered across two broad themes as follows:

- Strengthened cultural ties from participation in play, active recreation, and sport
- Increased wellbeing from participating in culturally relevant physical activity

Strengthened cultural ties from participation in play, active recreation, and sport

- Participation in play, active recreation, and sport provides opportunities to strengthen cultural ties and foster feelings of cultural identity and belonging, especially where the participation may be in traditional games, sports, or activities (e.g. Māori games and activities such as kapa haka and Ki o Rahi, or the growth of festivals such as the Pasifika Village Games).^{41 42 43}

Increased wellbeing from participating in culturally relevant physical activity

- The evidence based on research with Māori communities indicates that the ability of Māori to participate in traditional Māori sports, or in sport more generally “as Māori”, fosters a sense of wellbeing. This is achieved through strengthening social connections, intergenerational relationships, connection to the whenua, and feelings of identity and culture that are built around sport and physical activity.⁴²
- A literature review on the value of play, active recreation, and sport in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2021 found that much of the research on social wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand relates to Māori communities, which suggests that, for Māori, the social wellbeing outcome is an important outcome of sport and recreational physical activity.⁴²

“When I think of Māori netball and even waka ama, the broader outcomes of whanaungatanga and joy and just being Māori contributed to our wellness. We’ve used our networks through sport to get to being well, to being better balanced, happier people.” Carol Ngawati, Māori Touch⁴²

“Waka ama physically connects my family to our local community and spiritually it connects us through the water, all that have paddled before us and everyone who will paddle in the future. It’s a beautiful thing.” Waka ama participant⁴⁴

Case Study: Waka Ama, A Vehicle for Māori Cultural identity – Waka Ama New Zealand

From humble beginnings less than 40 years ago to events that attract more than 3,500 participants today, waka ama is on a growth trajectory in New Zealand.

In 2019 the 30th annual Waka Ama Sprint Championships on Lake Karāpiro attracted a record number of paddlers. More than 1,700 teams from 61 clubs raced for national sprint titles, with crowds of up to 10,000 cheering them on. Participants ranged in age from 5–81 years old.

⁴¹ Hapeta, J., Palmer, F., and Kuroda, Y. (2019). [Cultural identity, leadership and well-being: How indigenous storytelling contributed to well-being in a New Zealand provincial rugby team](#). Public Health. 176. 68–76.

⁴² Davies, L; Dalziel, P & Savage, C. (2023). [Social Return on Investment of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Technical Report](#).

⁴³ Yogman et al (2018). [The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children](#). Pediatrics, Volume 142;3

⁴⁴ Sport New Zealand (2020). [The Growth of Waka Ama – Case Study](#)

Waka ama is practised and thrives as a sport of Pacific origin throughout the world. In New Zealand the sport has a high percentage of Māori competitors at both secondary and club level, and the opportunity to connect with their culture is an integral factor to many participants' involvement and connection with the sport.

Waka ama is a vehicle for Māori cultural identity for participants and supporters. Culture is deeply embedded in the sport – not just on the water but in all that occurs at events, from the language to the protocols followed.

As the sport is steeped in the powerful history and traditions of waka sailing and voyaging it is seen as not just a sport, but a vehicle for identity, pride, and community.

"I believe waka ama...has been an invaluable part of growth and development for me in my life, spirituality, emotionally, mentally, and physically. Fortunate and honoured I feel to be Māori and have a strong innate sense of connectedness to who I am through our tipuna who journeyed on waka, setting this in motion for us today...Without writing a novel waka ama is a whole lot of everything complimentary to life on land, that I have much respect for and I believe it has the potential to teach, heal and help people of all walks from an indigenous Māori perspective." Waka ama participant

Sources and Related links:

- [Growth of Waka Ama case study](#)

Case Study: The Walking Samoans

The Walking Samoans is an initiative started by the Samoan community to encourage healthy living through walking.

Initiated by Radio Samoa in 2013, the station encourages listeners to sign up to their local walking group, as a good way for Samoan families to take control of their own health as a family unit. The groups have now spread across Auckland.

The initiative is built on Samoan culture integrating aspects of language, prayer, cultural dance, family, and the community. The value of the Walking Samoans initiative is demonstrated through the growth and popularity of the walks with participants highlighting the health and social benefits they get from attending. A key reason for the success of this initiative is that it is owned by the community – "Samoan people helping themselves in a Samoan way".

Local boards are supporting these groups as needed, often in the form of grants towards uniforms and sports shoes, and a number of walking clubs have also used council facilities.

"We get a lot of feedback about how seeing this group around the community helps everyone feel safer and more connected...It's a good example of how the local board is able to support our diverse communities to be empowered to deliver what it is that they know will work for their communities."

Chris Makoare, Maungakiekie Tāmaki Local Board member.

Sources and Related Links:

- [Tagata Pacifika – The Walking Samoans Video](#)
- [Walking towards better health - OurAuckland \(aucklandcouncil.govt.nz\)](#)
- [Meet the Walking Samons – Stuff article](#)

Health and Skill Development

Participation in play, active recreation, and sport is associated with improved health outcomes and education engagement, which supports more productive and engaged communities.

Play, active recreation, and sport also support other wellbeing outcomes that are beneficial to local authorities and the wellbeing of their communities such as improved health and education outcomes. For example:

- Participation in sport and active recreation can decrease rates of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety and non-communicable disease (cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes) and improve life expectancy.^{45 46}
- A New Zealand study found that those people who met the global physical activity recommendations had 51% higher odds of having healthy mental wellbeing.⁴⁷
- In 2019 in New Zealand, \$9.02 billion return could be attributed to health outcomes as a result of participation in play, active recreation, and sport. This includes better quality of life and increased life expectancy and prevention of diseases attributable to physical inactivity.⁴⁸
- Engagement in play has been shown to improve executive functioning, language, early math skills, physical development and health, and enhanced sense of self control.⁴⁹
- The New Zealand Sport in Education programme found using sport as a context for learning and engagement in schools resulted in improved attendance rates, decreased behaviour incidents, higher retention rates, increased engagement levels and task or assignment completion, and improved NCEA results.⁵⁰
- Participation in sport has been linked with greater employability in graduates. This correlation is stronger for those who volunteer.⁵¹
- 84% of respondents to a Value of Sport survey agreed that many essential life skills are learned playing sport.⁵²

⁴⁵ World Health Organisation. (2010). [Global Recommendations on physical activity for health](#). World Health Organization, Geneva; 2010

⁴⁶ British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health, Loughborough University. (2014). Evidence Briefing: Physical Activity for Children and Young People. Loughborough University

⁴⁷ Richards, J., Barnes, M., Brocklesby, J., Keane, A., Lynch, B., Mayo, K., McCarty, G., McEwen, H., and Walker, M. (2018). [Active NZ: Recreational Physical Activity and Mental Wellbeing](#).

⁴⁸ Davies, L; Dalziel, P & Savage, C. (2023). [Social Return on Investment of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand. Technical Report](#).

⁴⁹ Yogman et al (2018). [The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children](#). Pediatrics, Vol 142;3

⁵⁰ Boyd, S. and Hopkins, R. (2016). Staying the Distance. Sport in Education - Sustaining Practice Developed through the Sport in Education Initiative. NZCER (unpublished)

⁵¹ Allen, K., Bullough, S., Cole, D., Shibli, S., and Wilson, J. (2013). The Impact of Engagement in Sport on Graduate Employability Final Report. Sport Industry Research Centre Sheffield Hallam University

⁵² Angus & Associates (2017). [Better Understanding the Value of Sport](#)

Using the information in this document

This document has been developed to provide an evidence base for local government investment in play, active recreation, and sport. We hope that this information can be used to support submissions to local council planning processes as well as internal discussions within councils to support the case for investment in play, active recreation, and sport.

Most of the information in this report is at a national or more general evidence level. We therefore recommend you use this information as a starting point and supplement it with regional specific data and examples where available.

Prioritisation of investment is an area of particular interest for many local government organisations. Given the variation in local priorities, outcomes, and other local circumstances, we are unable to advise on which specific projects will give the greatest return on investment. However, factors that should be considered alongside the evidence provided in this document include:

- What outcomes are initiatives and projects looking to achieve and how do these align to local priorities?
- How many people are expected to benefit from the proposed investment (i.e. is it expected to benefit a large number of people from across the community or a small group interested in a specific activity)?
- What is the likely demographic make-up of those expected to benefit from the investment (i.e. will it benefit communities currently missing out on the benefits of physical activity or will it benefit mainly those who are already well-served?)
- For facilities – does it cater for a wide range of uses (i.e. multi-use hubs) or is it single use?
- What impact is the investment expected to have on physical activity rates and wellbeing for your region?

Other information that may also support submissions and conversations include:

- [Social Return on Investment](#) (SROI) of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand study. Case studies about the SROI from specific programmes are expected to be available shortly.
- [Regional Spaces and Places Plans](#) outline the approach to regional planning of spaces and places relating to play, active recreation, and sport for different regions throughout Aotearoa.
- Data relating to how people participate from the [Sport NZ Active NZ survey](#).